



By Ray Henry  
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A Republican budget proposal cutting roughly \$5 billion in federal agriculture spending would have a "pretty devastating effect" on the state's single-largest economic sector, Democratic U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop said Wednesday.

Bishop and Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black, a Republican, spoke to reporters after meeting to discuss ways of protecting federal farm spending as Congress weighs deep budget cuts. House Republicans passed a continuing budget resolution Saturday proposing cuts to a range of agriculture programs, although the Senate has not yet acted on it.

"It's necessary that we cut the budget, that we act in a fiscally responsible way, that we find efficiencies so we can ultimately balance the federal budget, which is a real Herculean task," Bishop said. "Nevertheless, we want to make sure we establish the right priorities."

Republican Rep. Hal Rogers, chair of the House Appropriations Committee, said this weekend that the deep cuts are warranted.

"We held no program harmless from our spending cuts, and virtually no area of government escaped this process unscathed," Rogers said in a statement.

Bishop, who sits on an agriculture subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, said his top priorities are maintaining direct federal payments to farmers, keeping programs that pay growers when commodity prices drop and keeping federally subsidized crop insurance programs. He said he also supports federal money for agriculture research and marketing.

When asked, Bishop said he could not immediately name individual agriculture programs that he believed could be cut. The Democrat said expanding agriculture insurance systems could save money by reducing the need for farmers to request special disaster payments from Congress.

Bishop said lawmakers can also examine agriculture programs with the goal of making them more efficient and cutting duplication.

"You just have to really review what is absolutely necessary, what is most desirable, and then establish priorities for the resources that are available," Bishop said.

During an interview, Black declined to comment on the continuing budget resolution passed by his fellow House Republicans. He spoke last week in Washington with members of Georgia's Congressional delegation about why he considers next year's Farm Bill important. The legislation sets significant financial funding for farmers.

Black said funding cuts are coming, but that it's important not to dismantle programs critical to growers and rural communities.

"Every time we get into a Farm Bill discussion, there are always those who simply want to do away with it," he said.